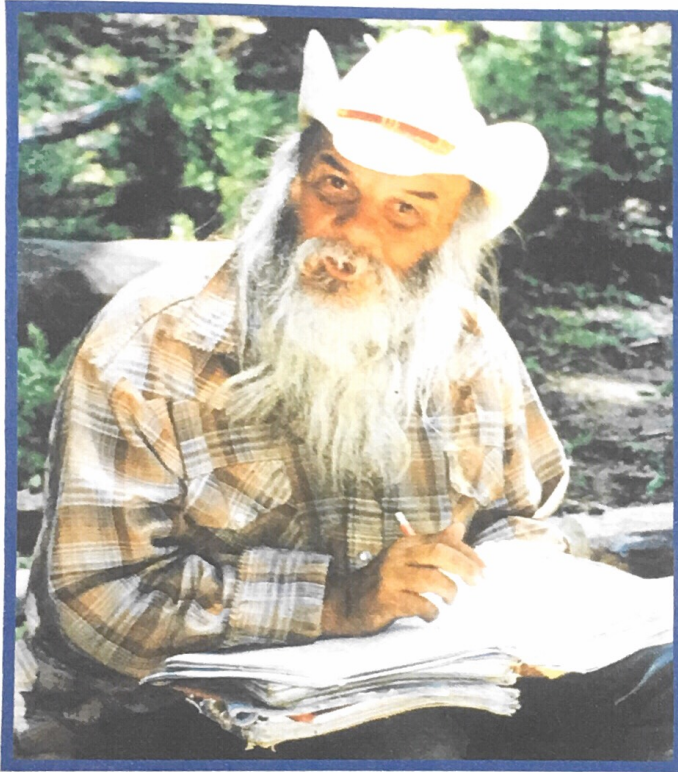




Rainbow Family

Life Stories



*by Jodey Bateman.
Interviews with Rainbow
Family of Living Light
folks conducted between
1977 and 2008.*

*Scanned in 2018.
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14.B ORO - "The Woody Guthrie
 Memorial"
- with comment by Walt

5 pages

[14.B]

Oro - The Woody Guthrie Memorial

with comment by Watt

[Oro didn't wish to discuss more of her life than her attempt to have a memorial made for Woody Guthrie in his hometown. Woody is important in himself as a poet of Rambo who died five years before the first gathering. He wanted to make ballads for a stable industrial working class and their unions, but his songs are most remembered and loved by those who live their lives on the road as he did.]

ORO I was born in Oklahoma City in 1938. I'm the daughter of a reporter. I've always had a sense of history. I was in Okemah, Oklahoma, Woody Guthrie's home town, for a year as an editorial writer for the Okemah Daily Leader. It was a tiny place - no movie theater, about 25 businesses.

I wrote editorials back around '61 asking for the city and the Library Board to consent to having a room in the city library dedicated to Woody Guthrie. I'd just heard Woody Guthrie all my life. Well, it was obvious. The man was like one of the roots of music in our country. And I felt like Woody Guthrie made that town a site of historical importance. Those were my feelings that it would be, whether the town's people wanted it or not.

At that time people in Okemah talked about Woody Guthrie behind closed doors. It was because of his sympathy with the Communists. Hostile is too strong a word. A pathy is a small town's strongest weapon.

A member of Woody's family was going to give us Woody's first guitar and all of his hand-written manuscripts - you know, the songs he wrote as he traveled around, to put in the memorial room. An old lady on the Library Board, Leila Chowning - she was beautiful. She was a dominating influence in the town and she was in favor of the memorial room. She was an old-fashioned Southern schoolteacher in her 70's. She had taught everybody in the town and she called them all by their nicknames. Like she called the banker "Piggy." She knew Woody. She said he was full of music, that his genius showed every day. She was my best friend. She

was the only one in town besides me who was in favor of the memorial room. The people in Okemah all said I was crazy then. She was ahead of her time, that's for sure.

The tourists - the hippies really - kept passing through and asking where the Woody Guthrie memorial was and there wasn't any. I've talked to hitch hikers from other parts of the country who have come to see the place where Woody Guthrie used to live. It's an old farm house. They sing his songs there for his spirit and write messages on the wall, personal messages for Woody. The walls are covered with Woody Guthrie graffiti.

[Walt gave this account of his pilgrimage to Woody's old home in 1975]

Walt Peralle - Leaving Messages for Woody Guthrie

I was born in 1950, I was a Marine in Vietnam. I'm one of three left alive in my company. I had a buddy from Phoenix who had a guitar and I had a Jew's harp. I had heard some of Woody's songs on a Kingston Trio album and he knew some. So when we got to Vietnam, we'd ask each other "Do you know this one?" and we'd sing his songs. And it would be relaxing. So I read Woody's books. Through the stuff he's put down that he's written, I think he liked the life he led. He knew his shit. He had a whole lot of guts. He didn't let the hot dog people get to him. Like a fraternity guy who's really into fraternities, I call a hot dog person. Or the cop that picked me up when I was hitching and he ate a young cop's lunch out because he talked to me. He's a hot dog guy. I just made that word up.

A guy named Walker owns Woody's old place now. He's a relative of Nora, Woody's mother. He'd sell it for a monument when he gets enough money. It's the best monument the way it is now. It's a place for hitch hikers and people who care.

People kind of look at you in Okemah when you ask where the place is. It's amazing - you feel comfortable in Woody's house even though it was cold as hell outside and the wind was blowing. There's a spirit around there. It's warm.

They don't need a tourist place selling Woody Guthrie souvenirs.

All they need to do is just fix up the porches. Woody's lookout porch on the east side of the house - it's in such bad shape I didn't go out on it.

Some high school kids had come in and wrote FUCK on the walls with spray paint. Some one wrote near it, "I wonder what drove some people to write the terrible things they did here. Don't they know this is the home of the poet of the people?"

There are other messages for Woody on the walls. [Note by Jody Bateman: I visited Woody's old home of Ter Oro and Walt told me about it. Some of the following messages to Woody were copied by Walt and others by me when I was there in 1976.]

"Woody, I made it. Alone. You're still alive. Look at all the people who love you. Larry Bohannon - Atlanta, Georgia."

"Woody I got the feeling I had to come and see your old home. I didn't understand until this morning when I met you. I believe in you, God and myself. Pam Williams. 74."

"Woody, Me and Marge just came by to see where you lived. We're going to sing your songs all the way to Calif. From a couple of '72 type Dust Bowl refugees, Nancy and Marge."

"They never care till it's too late! Dennis - Riverside, Calif."

"Standing in your shadow hearing whispers from the past Sun moved behind the clouds. After the rain we'll see at last."

SJP and M. Horner 12-2-74."

"From the subway trains to the windy plains
Woody, Woody your songs remain."

T. Organeks"

"Well, Woody I finally made it. Take it easy, but take it."

Millard Lampell Jan. 1972"

"We're all proud of you Woody. Arlo"

"Woody, though my name might be by some who are famous, it stands for the people of Okemah who think you are great!"

Sarah Miller 11/6/76 Okemah"

"Kiva Sweet Kiva."

"Dylan wrote all his songs here"

"Timothy W. Daniel, John C. Powell, Leo Parker. All brothers and friends. July 28, 1976." Sol

"Hey, hey, Woody Guthrie I didn't write you a song
When I came here you were already gone
I don't know you, I don't know you at all
But there's something that answers like a call
I'll do it, Woody

Stephen W. (Switzerland)"

Still Alive

And hangin' in

Where I'm goin'

Is where you been.

Kym 5-31-76"

"Woody - I've heard your voice and felt your tune. Yesterday was truly a beautiful day for me. I spent 3 hours with your sister Mary Jo. A truly great person. She brought me close to you, your life and sorrows. I'll see ya in Glory Land, my friend.

Sharon Hines Hills

of Greentop, Missouri 8/14/76"

"Merci Woody

French TV Yves Claude"

"Mike Lester made this first stop hard travelin' to California. May this place become a spontaneous monument. 6/15/76"

"Woody, I can't believe I'm finally here and traveling. Ya know, cross country just to dig it. I've read this place and heard it all before. Thanks

Don Ganner '72

Shreveport, La."

"Of all the stuff

Written on the wall

That makes you so tall

As the songs and dreams

You had about

OUR land Karen Williams 8-76"

"Hey, hey, Woody Guthrie/This land is your land
and in your home I can sing

This land is my land

From the Oklahoma Hills / to the Brooklyn Bridge
Through all that country

So long, it would be good to know you!

Merci - Yannick Tozier This June 23, 1976

Nizay (France) "

"Woody, the better world you sang about may not be a
reality yet, but the love for you that these writings
express leaves me with a more optimistic outlook for a
better, universal, humanistic world. You are always living
of your poems and songs. The world was lucky to have you
- even for a short time. Alicia Pope

Kathleen Pope - Seattle Wash.

7/10/74 "

"Will Rogers made me feel American. Woody Guthrie
makes me feel right at home. Bruce Galello

New Rochelle, N.Y. "

"We love you, Woody. The moment of Inspiration is here."

COMMENT BY WALT

That's the truth. It's a heavy damn place. You gotta go
there if you are into Woody at all. I'm going back there.
I told him that.

[Since then Woody's house has been torn down]